



success story

AWARE Approach Strengthens Advocacy for Safer Motherhood in Burkina Faso

Maternal and infant mortality rates in West Africa are among the highest in the world. Every day in Burkina Faso, eight women and 24 newborns die from pregnancy-related complications, while 200 more women survive with long-term disabilities, such as obstetric fistula. This is especially tragic as simple methods can often prevent maternal death and disability.

The AWARE Approach

To bring attention to the plight of women and children in Burkina Faso, advocacy efforts are essential. In 2005, Action for West Africa Region–Reproductive Health (AWARE-RH), a project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), introduced an initiative to engage key stakeholders (such as governments, nongovernmental organizations, multilateral organizations, and civil society organizations) in efforts to advocate for



appropriate policies toward and increased funding for maternal and neonatal health programs. Using a computer-based advocacy tool called REDUCE, stakeholders are able to use concrete data to demonstrate the economic benefits of investing in maternal health.

Using the REDUCE tool, a team of representatives from these stakeholder organizations estimated that key investments in maternal health over a 10-year period would save the lives of 20,000 women and 53,000 children, while another 789,000 women would be spared long-term disabilities. Furthermore, they calculated that the economic productivity gained through these investments would surpass the costs of implementing the interventions.

Together, the team used this information to prepare an advocacy plan, which included a presentation highlighting the key arguments for increased funding and improved policies for maternal health. They then presented their results

“REDUCE helped us reinforce our commitment to reach the Millennium Development Goals.”

*—Ghislaine Conombo, former Director,
Department of Family Health, Burkina Faso*

at an advocacy event, which attracted members of the media, high-level government officials, members of civil society and multilateral institutions, and donors. After the event, the team continued their efforts by presenting the results to members of the Ministry of Health and of the parliament.

Results

Providing such compelling evidence has led to real success in advocacy efforts for maternal health. In Burkina Faso, the REDUCE tool helped to secure an increase in the national budget for health from 7-8% in 2005 to 11% in 2006. An increase to 15% is planned for 2007.

Additionally, the government allocated approximately US\$733,500 for the purchase of contraceptive commodities, since family planning is a service that contributes to the reduction of maternal mortality. The Ministry of Health also decided to subsidize 80% of the cost of emergency cesarean sections—reducing the cost to patients from US\$110 to US\$25.

“By providing statistics on the number of women and children who die every day and on the loss of productivity in monetary amounts, we are able to make a considerable impression on the minds [of the audience]. The data from REDUCE makes the problem more real and tangible.”

—Fabienne Richard, a midwife with the Projet d’Amélioration de la Qualité et de l’Accès aux Soins Obstétricaux d’Urgence (Project for the Improvement of Quality of and Access to Emergency Obstetric Care) in Burkina Faso

Furthermore, as a result of advocacy messages from the REDUCE process, civil society organizations in Burkina Faso are now assisting in efforts to sensitize the public on warning signs during pregnancy and labor and on the need to seek immediate obstetric care. In December 2005, the information gathered by the REDUCE tool was also presented at the “Vision 2010” mid-term evaluation meeting of African First Ladies in Bamako.

Next Steps

In collaboration with local partners, including United Nations agencies, the Ministry of Health, and the Center for African Family Studies, AWARE-RH continues to support efforts to improve maternal and newborn health in Burkina Faso. AWARE-RH has also implemented the REDUCE process in Ghana, Mali, and Mauritania, with plans to expand REDUCE to Niger and Togo.

For more information about AWARE-RH’s advocacy efforts, please contact Badara Seye, Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor, at bseye@aware-rh.org.

AWARE-RH (Action for West Africa Region - Reproductive Health) is a five-year, USAID-sponsored health improvement project designed to improve access to health care and quality of services in 21 West African countries. Guided by a vision of strong, relevant, and sustainable regional health institutions and networks, AWARE-RH proactively assists national and cross-border health programs in developing quality services that meet the needs of their people. To learn more about AWARE-RH, please visit www.aware-rh.org.